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Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the Government of Iran's lack of protection for internationally recognized human rights creates poor conditions for religious freedom in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 8, 2009

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the Government of Iran's lack of protection for internationally recognized human rights creates poor conditions for religious freedom in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Whereas the people of Iran have demonstrated a deep and lasting desire for peace, stability, democracy, and pluralism;

Whereas the Department of State concluded in its March 2008 Country Report on Human Rights Practices that Iran's poor human rights record worsened and the Government of Iran continues to commit serious abuses;

Whereas the Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report 2007 concluded that there was a continued deterioration of the extremely poor status of respect for religious freedom, and every year since 1999 the Department has designated Iran a "country of particular concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for its violations of religious freedom;

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has found that the Government of Iran engages in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, and continues to recommend that Iran be designated a "country of particular concern";

Whereas the Government of Iran carries out summary executions, including of minors, following trials that lack due process;

Whereas Iranian authorities continue to abuse and torture detainees and prisoners, including carrying out severe punishments such as amputations and floggings;

Whereas the Government of Iran systematically suppresses the freedoms of expression and press, and severely limits the freedom of assembly of its own citizens;

Whereas the Government of Iran's monopoly on enforcement of their interpretation of Islam negatively affects the human rights of women in Iran, including their right to the freedoms of movement, association, thought, conscience, and religious, as well as freedom from coercion in matters of religion or belief;

Whereas ethnic and religious minorities are subject to harsh treatment by Iranian authorities;

Whereas, since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, significant numbers from religious minority communities fled Iran for fear of persecution;

Whereas, during the past year, the Government of Iran's poor religious freedom record deteriorated with intensified harassment, detention, arrests, and imprisonment, especially for Baha'is, Sufi Muslims, and Evangelical Christians;

Whereas Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's denials of the Holocaust and statements calling for Israel to be "wiped off the map" have created a climate of fear among Iran's Jewish community, as official policies promoting anti-Semitism are on the rise and official discrimination against Jews continues to be pervasive;

Whereas, over the past several years, and particularly since President Ahmadinejad came to power, members of the Baha'i community have been harassed, physically attacked, arrested, and imprisoned, and more than 200 Baha'is have been executed since the beginning of the Iranian Revolution in 1979;

Whereas, in May 2008, Iranian authorities arrested 6 Baha'i leaders, as well as at least a dozen Christian converts from Islam;

Whereas the 6 Baha'i leaders, as well as a 7th who was arrested in March 2008, are being held incommunicado, without access to legal counsel;

Whereas, in November 2007, three Baha'is were sentenced to 4 years in prison for allegedly spreading propaganda against the regime, and 51 others received suspended sentences for the alleged crime of setting up a program to educate poor Iranian children;

Whereas Baha'i youth and children in Iran are denied the universal right to education, expelled from educational institutions, and vilified by teachers and professors;

Whereas Christians, in particular Evangelicals and other Protestants, in Iran continue to be subject to harassment, arrests, close surveillance, and imprisonment, and many converts from Islam to Christianity have fled the country for fear of persecution;

Whereas Muslim minorities continue to face repression, including Iranian Sunni leaders who have reported widespread abuses and restrictions on their religious practice, such as detentions and torture of Sunni clerics, as well as bans on Sunni teachings in public schools and religious literature, even in predominately Sunni areas;

Whereas Sufis face growing repression of their communities and religious practices by the Government of Iran, including increased intimidation, harassment, and detention of prominent Sufi leaders by the intelligence and security services in recent years;

Whereas, in November 2007, clashes in western Iran between security forces and followers of a mystic Sufi order resulted in dozens of injuries and arrests after authorities began bulldozing a Sufi monastery;

Whereas ethnic Turkmen Sunnis from northeastern Iran, bordering Turkmenistan, report an intense government campaign to convert them to Shi'a Islam;

Whereas dissidents and political reformers continue to be imprisoned on criminal charges for criticizing the regime;

Whereas a 2007 Department of State report cites Iran for widespread serious abuses, including unjust executions, politically motivated abductions by security forces, tor-

ture, arbitrary arrest and detention, and arrests of women's rights activists;

Whereas a number of senior Shi'a religious leaders who have opposed various Iranian government policies on political or religious grounds have also been targets of state repression, including house arrest, detention without charge, trial without due process, torture, and other forms of ill treatment;

Whereas the Iranian Parliament is considering a new law that would impose serious punishments, including the death penalty, on converts from Islam, as although the Government of Iran has applied the death penalty for apostasy in the past, it has not been explicitly codified;

Whereas, in its current state, the draft penal code is not consistent with the Government of Iran's international obligations and therefore should not enter into force; and

Whereas Whereas, if this draft penal code is passed, it would seriously endanger the lives of all Baha'is, Muslim dissidents, and converts from Islam: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) calls for the release of all religious prisoners
3 in Iran and for United States officials, at the high-
4 est levels, to vigorously speak out publicly about the
5 deteriorating conditions for freedom of thought, con-
6 science, and religion or belief in Iran, including
7 drawing attention to the need for the international
8 community to hold authorities accountable in spe-
9 cific cases where severe violations have occurred;

1 (2) calls on the United Nations Human Rights
2 Council to monitor carefully and demand compliance
3 with the recommendations of the representatives of
4 those special mechanisms that have already visited
5 Iran, particularly those of the United Nations Spe-
6 cial Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief,
7 the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and the
8 Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion on Ex-
9 pression;

10 (3) encourages the United Nations Human
11 Rights Council to continue to use its procedures to
12 maintain oversight conditions for freedom of religion
13 or belief in Iran, including, as Iran has issued a
14 standing invitation, continued visits and reporting by
15 the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or
16 Belief, and other relevant special rapporteurs and
17 working groups;

18 (4) supports—

19 (A) the continued designation of Iran as a
20 “country of particular concern” under the
21 International Religious Freedom Act of 1998
22 for its systematic, ongoing, and egregious viola-
23 tions of religious freedom;

24 (B) funding budgeted to promote democ-
25 racy and human rights in Iran that includes

1 support for effective initiatives to advance free-
2 dom of religion or belief, as well as ways to pro-
3 mote rule of law programs that specifically seek
4 to protect religious minorities;

5 (C) adequate funding for United States
6 public diplomacy entities, such as Voice of
7 America and Radio Farda, and the expansion
8 and development of new programming solely fo-
9 cused on human rights, including the freedom
10 of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, in
11 Iran;

12 (D) supports the commission of an inde-
13 pendent review of Voice of America Persian and
14 Radio Farda to ensure that the programming
15 reflects the basic tenants of freedom of infor-
16 mation, equality, transparency, and journalistic
17 integrity that America espouses;

18 (E) a United Nations General Assembly
19 resolution condemning severe violations of
20 human rights, including freedom of religion of
21 belief, in Iran, and calling for officials respon-
22 sible for such violations to be held accountable;
23 and

24 (F) the establishment of a diplomatic
25 envoy to the nation immediately to establish

1 dialogue with the Government of Iran and deep-
2 en relationships with the Iranian people; and
3 (5) calls on the Government of Iran to—

4 (A) immediately release all prisoners who
5 have been detained on account of their religion
6 or belief;

7 (B) immediately release all prisoners of
8 conscience who have been detained on account
9 of their political dissidence;

10 (C) modify the draft penal code in order to
11 respect the obligations under the international
12 human rights conventions to which the Govern-
13 ment of Iran is a party;

14 (D) uphold its international commitments
15 by respecting and protecting the human rights
16 of all its citizens; and

17 (E) ratify and fully comply with inter-
18 national human rights instruments and cooper-
19 ated with United Nations human rights mecha-
20 nisms.

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